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The Pop Lover's Guide to the Galaxy

WITH THE ORIGINAL *BRITANNICA*, the british designed the modern concept of an encyclopedia, and the compiling bug has been in their blood ever since. England's Phil Hardy and Dave Laing have collaborated on various pop overviews since the mid-'70s; *The Faber Companion to 20th-Century Popular Music* (Faber and Faber, 875 pages, $29.95) is their summary statement to date, the story of pop music told through (supposedly all) its important performers, producers and talent scouts. The authors are creatures of the rock era, comfortable with the excesses and exultations of electronic technology and music, at ease with the idea of a multicultural hit parade. The great divide among pop historians, of course, is between all sounds rock (including R&B) and all other sounds. Hardy and Laing are foggy on the scope and tone of music before World War II, which is still the forte of Peter Gammond's *Oxford Companion to Popular Music*. There, stage and music hall reigned, and the attitude is that all the entries have passed the test of time. Anyone with a rock appetite, however, will quickly sense that as long as Gammond is in charge, certain types of music simply will not pass. Most libraries offer only mere wisps of pro-rock references, so Hardy and Laing's is a rare and laudable achievement.

Inevitably, Hardy and Laing's criterion for inclusion in the Faber Guide is whether a particular musician or entrepreneur or producer has raised a wave with either the general British public or the authors themselves. So even a book wrapped in the bosom of rock and soul allows for some distortions of recent pop. American contributions to heavy metal are downplayed (few mid-'60s punks, no Blue Cheer). Hardy and Laing's regard for punk is hard to ascertain ('80s post-whatevers are shafted); their jazz quotient just barely makes the grade, and they don't have a worked-out sensibility about it. (Ornette Coleman is "one of the most important individuals in popular music history," yet he rates only a skimpy half page, and they don't explain him at all well.) Finally, *The Faber Companion* is crowded with the kinds of editing errors that throw tiny poison darts at credibility: some are minor (Iggy Pop's real name is James *Jewell* Osterberg, not James *Newell*), some will gravel specialists (the Pretty Things' 1974 nugget is *Silk Torpedo*, not *Silk Parachute*), and some are shriekers (the Creedence classic becomes "Who'll Stop the Train").

But listen, none of that matters as long as you know Hardy and Laing will never tell you snob lies and that both grizzled devotees and junior-high converts can dip into *The Faber Companion to 20th-Century Popular Music* hundreds of times and learn something about musicians they thought they knew well. And even find out what a Showaddywaddy is.

— Milo Miles

MILES

him, say Miles this, Miles that, but man, every record he'd make, they'd go buy it.

Roy Porter's autobiography is There and Back *(Louisiana State University Press), written with David Keller.*

BUD SHANK
ALTO SAXIST

I worked a week with Miles in 1955, in Philadelphia at the Blue Note. It was one of the wildest, greatest experiences of my life. I learned "Solar." I learned "Well, You Needn't." Stuff that I still play today. You read all the things about the nasty things he said and did, but I never experienced any of those. By some strange coincidence, we were born a day apart. He had an impact on every musician's life, in all those different stages he went through. If he didn't hit you with one, he'd hit you with another.

RICHARD MELTZER
WRITER

It's kind of ironic, and I think ultimately appropriate, that somebody as no-compromise as Miles, because of his long association with Columbia Records, should be known to the bulk of his audience for, on one hand, makeout music, marketed side by side with Johnny Mathis, and on the other, fusion, somewhere between Blood, Sweat & Tears and the Mahavishnu Orchestra. For a guy with so pure and personal a conception, he was in too many ways a cultural chameleon, the David Bowie of jazz.

HORACE TAPSCOTT
PIANIST

Me and [trombonist] Lester Robertson just had a little conversation with Miles Davis outside of the It Club, on Washington Boulevard, I guess it was the late '50s, before he went in to play. We were standing outside, and he was coming in, and he started talking with us. The band, it was, like, that cold, hard, straight-ahead, traditional sound. The whole group was raw — Miles and Coltrane, and the rhythm section was Paul Chambers, and I can't recall if the drummer was Philly Joe [Jones] or not. Miles came out of the segregated area — he was farmed into that in those days too, most of us were. And the musicians were thinking about all the things that were happening around the country, and he was part of that feeling as well. So that was mostly the things that we rapped about.

His influence on me? His steadfastness.

LARANCE MARABLE
DRUMMER

Miles Davis and Dexter Gordon used to play together, and I used to hang around. There was a club on the corner of Vernon and San Pedro called the Zanzibar. They wouldn't let me in because I was too young, and I'd go around the side and stand on a box and peek through the window. I'd stay there for hours.

Miles Davis and Art Blakey came to Los Angeles, and I used to hang out with them, and they were working at the Haig on Wilshire. Blakey wasn't in the union, so he couldn't play. So I used to go down there every night and sit there, in case the union man came in, and it would appear that I was the one who was playing.

CHUCK NILES
RADIO HOST

My relationship with him, for what-

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